

with it? They ask if you are 18. If you say you are 18, that takes care of it; then they just sell them.

If you are a member of the Ten Most Wanted list, the most wanted criminals in the country, you can step up there and buy a gun. No one will ask you a question.

What about the gun owners the NRA claims to represent? In a poll that was conducted by the Center for Gun Policy and Research at Johns Hopkins University, two-thirds—66 percent—of gun owners said they favor background checks at gun show sales. Last year, the FBI issued a report which noted that between November 30, 1998, and June 15, 1999—less than a year, 6 months—the FBI failed to block about 1,700 gun sales to prohibited purchasers—in other words, people unfit, unable to meet basic standards—because it didn't have enough time to complete the background check. The FBI had to allow the gun sales to go through.

Those transactions were completed because the FBI didn't have enough time to complete the background check. So consequently, they had to issue gun retrieval notices and law enforcement had to try to track down the criminals who got the guns.

So we must not permit weakening of our criminal background check system. We should strengthen it, a system that has stopped more than 470,000 guns from being purchased in 6 years. Half a million people, almost, who wanted to buy guns, who were unfit to buy those guns—criminals, fugitives, other prohibited purchasers—tried to buy a gun and were stopped by Federal law from doing so. I think that is a good thing for people in our country to hear. It includes 33,000 spousal abusers who were denied a gun because of a domestic violence gun ban I wrote only 4 years ago.

The NRA makes another outrageous claim, that my gun show loophole closing bill won't make any difference; in other words, if there are guns out there bought by unknown people, that it doesn't matter. They say my legislation won't make it tougher for people to buy a gun to commit a crime. That is also nonsense.

But don't take my word for it. Look at what Robyn Anderson told the Colorado State Legislature recently. She is the woman who went with Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to the Tanner gun show in Adams County, CO. She said:

Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold had gone to the Tanner gun show on Saturday and they took me back with them on Sunday. . . . While we were walking around, Eric and Dylan kept asking sellers if they were private or licensed. They wanted to buy their guns from someone who was private—and not licensed—because there would be no paperwork or background check.

They needed Anderson's help because she was 18 and they were too young to buy guns. So Robyn Anderson bought 3 guns for them at the gun show, 2 shot-

guns and a rifle—3 guns that Harris and Klebold would use to murder 13 young people at Columbine High School.

Here is what she said. You read it and you will understand it, I hope. She said:

It was too easy. I wish it had been more difficult. I wouldn't have helped them buy the guns if I had faced a background check.

How much clearer could it be? Closing the gun show loophole will make a difference. I plead with all of my colleagues in this Chamber—I don't understand how we can ignore the cries of our people—I plead with them: Follow your conscience. Let's do the right thing. Whom are we hurting if we say you have to identify yourself when you buy a weapon? We are not hurting anybody.

By not demanding it, we permit this kind of thing to take place, unidentified gun buyers. That ought to shock everybody in America. Let's do what the people of this country expect us to do. Ten months ago, the Senate passed my amendment to close the gun show loophole. Now that bill is being held hostage in a conference committee.

For those who are not aware of what it is, a conference committee is a committee of the House and a committee of the Senate. They join together—it is called a conference committee—to iron out differences in legislation they want to see passed in both Houses.

Nothing has happened. The committee has met only one time, last year. They have not debated the issues. We are asking: Please, let that legislation go free. Don't let the gun lobby prevail over the families across this country who want to stop the gun violence.

Don't let the gun lobby rule what takes place in this Senate or in the House of Representatives. We have to do it now, before April 20, before the anniversary of that terrible day at Columbine High School. No one will forget it. No one who is alive and old enough to understand what took place will forget it. One year is time enough to act. April 20.

People across this country are asking: What has Congress done? What will they do? If one thinks they will be satisfied to hear that we have done nothing at all, I urge them to think again. And I urge people within the range of my voice to listen to what some are saying—that Congress will do nothing about it, even though children die across this country and adults die across this country. Over 33,000 a year die from gunshot wounds. We wound 134,000. In Vietnam, we lost 58,000 over the whole 10-year period that war was fought. But we lose 33,000 Americans a year—young, old, black, white, Christian, Jewish, it doesn't matter.

So I plead with my colleagues, give our people a safer country. They are entitled to that. If we have an enemy outside our borders, we are prepared to

fight that enemy. We have service personnel and airplanes with the latest equipment. We try to provide our law enforcement people—the police departments, FBI, drug enforcement agents, and border patrol people—with the weapons to fight crime. But each year, 33,000 people die from gunshots in this country. We ought not to permit that. I plead with my colleagues to help our people. Let's try to move forward with gun safety legislation as quickly as we can when we return the week after next.

I yield the floor.

Mr. GRAMS. I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### FEDERAL DAIRY POLICY

Mr. GRAMS. Recently, I came to the floor to address Federal dairy policy, specifically focusing on an erroneous but often repeated claim that dairy compacts are necessary today to guarantee a supply of fresh, locally produced milk to consumers. During that time, I dealt with how this is a myth similar to urban legends that are assumed to be true because they are repeated so often. Another dairy myth that you may hear a great deal is that dairy compacts preserve small dairy farms. Mr. President, this is simply not true, and this afternoon I want to point out the reasons why it is untrue.

The Northeast Dairy Compact sets a floor price that processors must pay for fluid milk in the region. Ostensibly, this is supposed to provide small farmers with the additional income necessary to help them survive during hard times. In its practical effect, it doesn't work that way at all. In fact, it has provided financial incentives for big dairy farms to get even bigger.

Consider the cases of Vermont and Pennsylvania. Vermont is in the Northeast Dairy Compact and Pennsylvania is not. Before the formation of the compact in 1997, Vermont had 2,100 dairy farms with an average herd size of 74 cows per farm. By 1998, the number of farms had fallen nearly 10 percent to 1900 dairy farms, but the average herd size had increased to 85 cows per farm. That is a 15-percent increase.

Meanwhile, during the same period of time in Pennsylvania—again, without the compact—the number of dairy farms fell 3 percent, from 11,300 to 10,900, but the average herd size increased only from 56 cows to 57 cows. Thus, in a compact State such as Vermont, the number of dairy farms fell significantly while the average herd size per farm increased significantly. And then compare that to the noncompact State of Pennsylvania during the same period. Their number of dairy farms dropped by a smaller number, and farm herd sizes increased by

an even smaller percentage. So this does not appear in any way to be a compact to protect small dairy farms.

The extra income that the compact provides to large farms accelerates their domination of the industry by helping them get larger and stronger. Since the amount of compact premium a producer receives is based entirely on the volume of production, the small amount of additional income a small farmer receives is often inconsequential and does nothing to keep small farms from exiting the industry. In fact, during the first year of the compact, dairy farms in New England declined at a 25 percent faster rate than the average rate of decline during the previous 2-year period.

The assertion that dairy compacts do not protect small farmers is not just something that this Minnesota Senator claims but compact supporters themselves have acknowledged as much. In the latter part of 1998, the Massachusetts commissioner of agriculture declared that the compact, after 16 months, had not protected small dairy farms. The commissioner consequently proposed a new method for distributing the compact premium to class I milk, capping the amount of premium any one dairy farm could receive and redistributing the surplus. Farms of average size or smaller would have seen their incomes increase by as much as 80 percent. However, large farm dairy interests were predictably able to kill this proposal because the assistance to small dairy farmers would have come, of course, out of their pockets. So while compact supporters perpetuate a sentimental picture of compacts enabling small family farmers to continue to work the land, the bottom line is that compacts hasten the demise of the small farmer while enriching the bigger producers.

This claim that compacts save small dairy operations is often made in conjunction with the claim that compacts are being unfairly opposed by large-scale Midwest dairy farms that want to dominate the market. Well, this, too, is untrue because the average herd size for a Vermont dairy farm is 85 cows per herd, while the average herd size for a Minnesota dairy farm is only 57 head. Thus, Vermont dairy farms average in size almost 50 percent larger than Minnesota dairy farms.

Similarly, the South, which has also sought to have its own compact, also has larger farms than the Midwest. The average herd size of a Florida dairy farm is 246 head. That is almost four times larger than the upper-Midwest average. Incidentally, Minnesota producers would love to be getting the mailbox price that farmers in Florida and the Northeast are getting.

In November of last year, the mailbox price—which is the actual price farmers receive for their milk—in the upper-Midwest was \$12.09 per hundred-

weight. In the Northeast, it was \$15.02. And in Florida, due to the milk marketing order system, it was \$18.72 per hundredweight. So in the Midwest it was \$12; in the Northeast it was \$15—that is \$3 per hundredweight more—and again, in Florida, it was \$18.72, or nearly \$7 a hundredweight more, or 50 percent more for milk produced in Florida than in Minnesota. How are you going to compete against this type of unfairness in the compact system and in the milk marketing orders?

So the Northeast price is 24 percent higher than Minnesota's, and Florida's price is almost 55 percent higher. Again, Minnesota farmers would love to get those kinds of mailbox prices, but our Government program—and again, the larger farmers in these areas unfairly benefit from this program—ensures that they don't and that these other regions do.

While dairy compacts are again not saving small dairy farms in compact States, they are impacting the bottom line of small-scale producers in non-compact States; in other words, those dairy farmers outside the compact. Compacts are a zero-sum game that shifts producer markets and income from one region of the country to competing regions. They don't have small family farms, and they certainly don't deserve the continuing sanction and the support of the Congress.

Again, there are other dairy myths that must be exposed, and the truth must be told. I will be back on the floor soon to take another look at a misleading claim, try to dissect it a little bit, and put some fairness into what we often hear in the dairy debates.

If we look at this system and why it is unfair, again to look at the prices farmers receive for the milk they produce, why is it fair that if you are in the Midwest, you get \$12.60 or \$12.70 per hundredweight, but if you are in New England in the compact States, you get \$15.20, and if you are a farmer in Florida, that somehow you can receive \$18.72 per hundredweight? I don't know. We don't sell computers that way. We don't sell oranges that way. We don't sell automobiles that way. Why is it milk is different? Why is the Government picking winners and losers among those who are in the dairy industry?

If you are in the Midwest, the Government says, well, you are going to be a loser, and if you are in Florida or in the compact States, our Government programs say you are going to get more so you can be a winner. I don't think we should have this type of competition and unfair playing field with the Government picking dairy winners and losers.

I hope we bring some sanity into our dairy program. I will be back on the floor to take on another misleading claim we often hear in these dairy debates.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### U.S. ENERGY DEPENDENCE

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I think I understand more than many the anger many Americans feel when they see gasoline pump prices at \$1.80 a gallon or higher. But I also think it is unfortunate that the Clinton-Gore administration has, for 8 years, kind of lulled Americans into believing that an unlimited supply of relatively cheap gasoline will be available from our so-called friends in OPEC.

As a consequence of that false sense of security, America's soccer moms, with the idea of running the kids here and there, have gone out and spent tens of millions of dollars on sport utility vehicles that barely get 15 miles a gallon. With today's gas prices, they find when they fill up one of those SUVs that it can put a big hole in a \$100 bill. It will cost \$70 or \$80. It is almost certain that gasoline will hit \$2 a gallon this summer because our refineries are not refining gasoline because they are still refining heating oil. Since they have not shut down for the conversion, we won't have on hand the reserves necessary to meet the requirements for the families in this country who are used to driving long distances in the summertime. It is going to happen. We are going to get \$2-a-gallon gasoline.

Americans I don't think should blame OPEC when the fault lies clearly with the Clinton-Gore administration and their energy policy, which is really no policy. They have no policy on coal, they have no policy on oil, and they have no policy on hydro other than it is nonrenewable, and they have no policy on natural gas. They say that is the savior. But they won't open up public land for oil and gas exploration, particularly in the upper belt of the Rocky Mountains, my State of Alaska, and the OCS areas.

What they propose is to put the Secretary of Energy on an airplane and send him over to Saudi Arabia with his hand out begging the Saudis to produce more oil. They made that trip; they made that request. And the Saudis said: We have a meeting of OPEC March 27. He said: No, you don't understand. There is an emergency in the United States. We need you to produce more oil. They said: You don't understand, Mr. Secretary. Our meeting is March 27.

That is hardly an adequate response to a nation that went over there and